

SOVIET MARXIST-LENINIST MORALITY IN
OSNOVY MARKSIZMA-LENINIZMA

Osnovy marksizma-leninizma is a complete exposition of the three component parts of Marxism-Leninism: philosophy, political economy, and scientific socialism. The text has five divisions. Philosophy is subdivided into dialectical materialism (Division I) and historical materialism (Division II). The political economy of capitalism is treated in Division III. Scientific socialism is subdivided into the theory and tactics of the international Communist movement (Division IV) and the doctrine of socialism and Communism (Division V).

Because tens of thousands of Soviets are required to master this text, it is very important for the study of Soviet morals. The text contains all the moral principles that must be observed by and inculcated in all Soviet citizens. Of course, the text is not important for the study of Soviet ethical theory, for which one must go to Soviet philosophical journals and monographs.

On page 723 of the Russian edition one finds the "Moral Code of the Builders of Communism".¹ The code originally appeared in the *Program of the XXII Party Congress*, but it has been incorporated into the *Osnovy*. The code does not strike the reader as a sudden shift to the area of morals because it is not the first place in the text where explicit moral demands have been made on all Soviet citizens.

The code has been defined as follows:

The moral code of the builder of Communism is a compilation of the scientifically established principles of Communist morality, which arose in socialist society and found their theoretical generalization in the program of the CPSU, adopted at the 22nd Party Congress.²

The code is a "compilation of scientifically established principles" because it is an integral part of the preceding divisions of the text. The principles have been scientifically established in earlier parts of the text, and acceptance or rejection of the code depends on acceptance or rejection of the preceding metaphysical and historiological foundations of the code. The code is founded upon a cosmological-historiological teleology, i.e., the

theory that the whole universe and all of human history are inevitably moving toward a final goal of world Communism. This teleological view of human history does not permit a simple passive contemplation on the part of the Soviets but demands their active and whole-hearted dedication and loyalty in promoting this world-historical movement.

The moral demands preceding the code on page 723 are not found in uniform distribution throughout the book. There are none made in Division I, in which the metaphysical foundations of all reality are established. Of course, the Soviet citizen is not free to accept or reject the tenets of Soviet philosophy, but they are not presented in terms of morals but in terms of an alleged scientific view of the world. The tenets of diamat and histomat belong to an area analogous to dogmatic theology rather than to moral theology.

Division II on historical materialism applies the laws of nature to human history, and consistency would seem to require that no moral demands be advanced in this area because it deals with the deterministic working out of impersonal laws. There is the "Spartacus problem" which occurs in the context of this division, but this is a question of ethical theory rather than a part of the moral demands made on contemporary Soviet citizens. The "Spartacus Problem" seems to result from an inconsistent intrusion of a natural law element into a Hegelian-like view of history.

Division III addresses a series of moral demands to the readers. It treats of the self-destruction of capitalism and Division IV treats of the role which the "Builder of Communism" must play in order to hasten this process. Division V, in which the code is found, presents the moral means which the moral citizen will use to attain the one moral ideal of the final stage of humanity, Communism. The means are moral and the citizen is moral only by analogy and only in relationship to the moral ideal of the end.

The moral demands are made in the form of 'approval words' and 'disapproval words'. By an 'approval word' I mean a word which is used to arouse a conviction of moral duty such that the citizen would work to promote the interests associated with that word and a 'disapproval word' denotes a concept or institution which it is the moral duty of the Soviet citizen to oppose. The following pairs of 'approval-disapproval words' are found in Table I.

TABLE I
Lexical pairs

Approval words	Disapproval words
1 non-antagonistic contradictions	1 antagonistic contradictions
2 nationalization of large industry	2 state monopolistic capitalism
3 internationalism	3 cosmopolitanism
4 social ownership	4 state ownership
5 patriotism	5 nationalism
6 party	6 caste of rulers
7 leader (vožd')	7 leader (Führer)
8 criticism	8 carping or bitching
9 conscious discipline	9 blind discipline
10 guidance	10 subjection
11 socialist co-operatives	11 state capitalist latifundia
12 farm family	12 isolated small farms
13 democratic centralism	13 bureaucratic centralism
14 leading role of the party	14 class hierarchy
15 stateproletariat	15 state bourgeoisie
16 friendship of nations	16 spheres of influence
17 pastor (svjaščennik)	17 churchman (cerkovnik)
18 socialist defense	18 fascist militarization
19 vanguard of the working class	19 ruling circles
20 scientific approach	20 dogmatism
21 moral intelligence	21 lack of moral intelligence
22 pan-national socialist state	22 narrow class rule

All 'approval words' are defined in terms of the proletariat and 'disapproval words' are defined in terms of the bourgeoisie.

Thus the moral basis or reason why all concepts in the left-hand column should be supported and those in the right-hand column opposed is rooted in the distinction between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. This distinction is taken from Marx's analysis of capitalist society, which posits exploitation as the only moral evil and sees the abolition of private property of the instruments of production as the necessary and sufficient condition of the end of exploitation.

Proletariat and bourgeoisie are distinguished from one another on the basis of the historicist, ethical monism of Marxism-Leninism; i.e., whatever helps the alleged forward movement of progressive humanity on its way to the inevitable culmination of human history in Communism is morally good, and this is the only criterion of what is morally good and morally

bad. In this sense Soviet morals are not relativistic because a moral good is asserted. The moral good is not based on an analysis of human nature and what man should do to lead the good life, but is grounded in historicism.

From an empirical or factual viewpoint there may be no difference in the amount of money spent on 'socialist defense' and 'fascist militarization', but when the Soviet Union builds missiles this is morally good because it defends the world-historical movement toward Communism, but when Washington builds them this is morally evil because it simply prolongs the last death agony of a decadent, historically doomed capitalism.

By definition, the Communist Party could never be opposed to the proletariat and any group which opposes the Communist Party must be an instrument of the bourgeoisie. Hence the general rule is that if the CPSU likes something and wants to arouse a sense of moral duty, then a word from the left-hand column of the list of lexical pairs is used and if the CPSU wants to arouse its citizens to fight, oppose or condemn something, then a word from the right-hand column is used and whatever the Party likes or dislikes is labeled respectively proletarian or bourgeois.

Because of the ethical demands explicitly advanced in the Marxist-Leninist view of history, the "Moral Code of the Builders of Communism" comes as no surprise to the reader. The very title of the code shows that it is grounded in a definite view of history. Richard T. De George has given an excellent and detailed analysis of the code and maintains that the code is provincial, paternalistic, Nechaevan, purely functional, emphasizes socially useful work, and externalizes values.

The code is provincial because it excludes large portions of humanity. Not only anti-Communists but those who do not build Communism are excluded from the realm of Soviet morality and presumably the code will not be valid after Communism has been built as it is addressed to those who are now building it. It is paternalistic because it was promulgated by a group of men who not only say they are infallible but impeccable, and are themselves not bound by the code in any meaningful way. It is Nechaevan because it maintains that the end justifies the means. It is purely functional because it is designed as a device of social control over the population. It emphasizes socially useful work and not work as the creative self-activity of unalienated man. Although the Soviets zealously maintain the fiction of working to abolish exploitation which was

central to the writings of the late Marx, they do not even bother to preserve the fiction of seeking to abolish alienation in labor. This notion is central to the currently much discussed *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*. In this respect the code is anti-Marxian. Finally, the code externalizes values by denying any interiority to human life.

Professor De George's evaluation of the code is sharply opposed to the claims made in *Osnovy*.

Thus, the moral principles of Communism include the basic universal-human moral norms, which were worked out by the masses in the course of thousands of years of struggle with social oppression and moral vices.³

This part of our paper proposes to discuss these conflicting analyses of the code. Both Professor De George and Soviet philosophers agree that the arrangement of the twelve principles is not accidental and that the first principle is the most important. In an article entitled, *The Most Important Principle Of Communist Morality*, M. G. Žuravkov says:

However, collectivism, humanism, social duty, and even conscientious labor for the welfare of society, still do not give any idea about the highest basic goals, in the name of which the builder of socialism and Communism lives and acts. The content of these demands of the moral code is defined, therefore, by a more general principle, which expresses the final goal of the proletariat and lends to all the others concrete social-historical meaning and a Communist direction. Precisely such a principle is the first principle of the moral code, which defines the essence of Communist morality – devotion to the cause of Communism, love of the socialist motherland and the socialist countries.⁴

Professor De George says the first of the twelve principles is the ultimate goal and the second simply the means to achieve the goal. The third, fourth, and fifth make it a moral duty to preserve the social wealth that the conscientious labor of the second principle created as means to achieve the goal. The tenth, eleventh, and twelfth tell the Soviet citizen whom to love and hate on the basis of their relationship to the first principle. Thus, seven of the twelve principles are simply explications of what is contained in the first. Professor De George further maintains that the sixth principle does not refer to all men, but only to those working toward socialism so it too is reducible to the first.

The remaining three principles, the seventh, eighth and ninth, contain traits common to most social or moral codes and some that are peculiar to Soviet society. I know of no moral code that maintains that the vices

opposed to the demands of these three principles are virtues, but these demands certainly have a peculiar content in the Soviet code. For example, "concern for the upbringing of children" means their upbringing in Communist morality and not in a tradition opposed to Communism and "parasitism" means not simply doing nothing but doing nothing to promote Communism. Thus, Pasternak could be called a 'parasite' even though he wrote literary masterpieces.

If Professor De George is correct in reducing principles 2-6 and principles 10-12 to the historicist first principle and the Soviets are right in maintaining that the code includes "basic, universal-human moral norms" (*osnovnye obščecelovečeskie moral'nye normy*), then these "universal-human norms" must be found in principles 7-9 or the phrase, "basic, universal-human moral norms", means something completely different from what the person accustomed to a natural law or an Aristotelian view of "universal-human norms" would understand by this phrase.

If a natural law interpretation is given, the phrase implies that there is a human nature common to those who have these universal-human features. But both dialectical and historical materialism deny any notion of a perdurable substratum of change. Thus it appears that the introduction of the concept of "basic, universal-human moral norms" is either an inconsistent intrusion of an Aristotelian element of permanence into a Hegelian system of dialectically evolving impermanence, or that the term 'universal-human' (*obščecelovečeskie*) as used in this text has a non-Aristotelian meaning. I add the prepositional phrase, *in this text (Osnovy)*, because when V. P. Tugarinov uses this word he intends it to be rooted in an element of permanence. For him, man is not simply a dialectical moment.⁵

At least two possible interpretations of the term 'universal-human' can be advanced:

(1) 'Universal-human' simply means everything which has been and is working to move history toward the world-historical goal of Communism and is not to be interpreted in the sense of characteristics or properties of individual men. There is no human nature but only the forward movement of humanity toward a final goal, in which the individual is simply a dialectical moment. One must not read into the *Osnovy* what other Soviet philosophers have written.

(2) The term 'universal-human' comes from Tugarinov and even in the *Osnovy* it should be interpreted as he uses it. For this reason *ličnoj* in principle might better be translated as *personal* rather than *private*. *Ličnyj* is not simply what is not public, but is related to the noun, *ličnost'*. One cannot speak of *v obščestvennoj i ličnoj žizni* unless there is *obščestvo i ličnost'*. The concept of *ličnost'* is certainly central to the work of Tugarinov for whom it is not simply the ensemble of social relations because a *ličnost'* has rights *vis-à-vis obščestvo*.

If the second interpretation of 'universal-human' is accepted, then it seems to me that Professor De George is slightly in error in saying that the code is "purely functional"⁶ and "an exclusively social morality".⁷ The words, *purely* and *exclusively*, are perhaps too strong because the single appearance of the adjectival form, *ličnoj*, in the sixth principle opens the door to Tugarinov's theory of *ličnost'* and all that it entails.

If the first interpretation is accepted, then I fully agree with Professor De George's exhaustive analysis of the code. The Soviets could also be correct in asserting that the code contains *osnovnye obščecelovečeskie moral'nye normy*, if the phrase is given a peculiarly Nechaevan or Leninist interpretation. If this is what is meant, then they should say so and not trade on the past meanings of the phrase and try to cash in on favorable connotations historically associated with the word.

In conclusion I submit two questions which could be used to determine what 'universal-human' actually means in *Osnovy*.

(1) Does an anti-Communist have basic, universal-human rights which the Communist Party of the Soviet Union is morally obligated to respect? If yes, then there are basic, universal-human moral norms in the second meaning of the phrase. If no, then there are none in the second meaning of the phrase and all moral norms are subordinate to the final goal of Communism. I do not think that any Soviet philosopher could publicly or officially answer this question in the affirmative.

(2) In building Communism could a Communist violate basic, universal-human moral norms? If yes, then the historicist claims of the building of Communism are morally subordinate to the human rights of presently existing men who cannot be used as means to promote the growth of a future society. If no, then Marxism-Leninism is a humanism of ideals which regards presently existing men as having only historically instrumental value and is not a humanism of principles which regards

them as having philosophically intrinsic value. The distinction which Professor Kline made in his analysis of the alleged humanism of the 'young Marx' is here applied to Soviet Marxism-Leninism.⁸ But I do not think a Soviet thinker would answer this question in the affirmative and, therefore, Soviet Marxism-Leninism is a humanism of ideals and not a humanism of principles.

REFERENCES

¹ The Moral Code of the Builders of Communism:

- devotion to the cause of communism, love of the socialist Motherland and the socialist countries;
- conscientious labor for the welfare of society: whoever does not work, does not eat;
- concern of everyone about the preservation and increase of social wealth;
- a high sense of social duty, intolerance of actions harmful to social interest;
- collectivism and comradely mutual assistance: one for all and all for one;
- humane relations and mutual respect between individuals – man is to man a friend, comrade, and brother;
- honesty and truthfulness, moral purity, simplicity and modesty in social and personal life;
- mutual respect in the family and concern for the upbringing of children;
- an uncompromising attitude toward injustice, parasitism, dishonesty, careerism, and greed;
- friendship and brotherhood among all peoples of the U.S.S.R.: intolerance of national and racial hatred;
- an uncompromising attitude toward the enemies of communism; peace and freedom of nations;
- fraternal solidarity with the working people of all countries and with all nations.

² *Filosofskaja énciklopedija* [Philosophical Encyclopedia], tom III, str. 723.

³ *Osnovy marksizma-leninizma*, M., 6t., 1962, Str. 723.

⁴ Žuravkov, M. G.: 'Važnejšij princip kommunističeskoj morali', *VF* (1963) 5, 3.

⁵ Tugarinov, V. P.: *Ličnost' i obščestvo* [Person and Society], 'Mysl', M., 1965, str. 9–41.

⁶ De George, Richard T.: *Soviet Ethics and Morality*, University of Michigan Paperbacks, Ann Arbor, 1969, p. 117.

⁷ De George, Richard T.: *The New Marxism*, Pegasus, New York, 1968, p. 109.

⁸ Kline, George L.: 'Was Marx an Ethical Humanist?', *SST* 9 (1969) 91–103.